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Public Library Partnerships which Add Value to the Community: the Hamilton Public Library experience

Beth Hovius



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Abstract

This paper focuses on a selection of partnerships which have strengthened the Hamilton Public Library's role in the provision of literacy and information services and added value to the City of Hamilton, in Canada. The focus is on community-based partnerships although the Hamilton Public Library also has many active partnerships with other libraries at the provincial and national level. The partnerships are arranged in chronological order. Over time, the Library's role within a partnership has evolved – from information and referral to content management and community empowerment.

Keywords: community development; public library services; partnerships; marketing; strategic planning

Background

Hamilton was, and is, a tough, gritty, industrial city with a higher than average level of poverty. At the same time there is strong community pride and civic commitment. In 2001 Hamilton was amalgamated with two other municipalities, thus creating the new city of about 520,000 residents. It is historically a steel city, although now, health, education and agriculture are the major employers. It is ethnically diverse. At least 10 percent of Hamilton's residents arrived in Canada within the past 15 years. New immigrants cluster in the lower city, creating neighbourhoods which are very diverse. For example, almost 100 languages are spoken at the high school nearest the Central Library.

The Hamilton Public Library is a good-sized library system with a 146,131 square feet (13,576 square metres) Central Library and 23 branches, half of which serve rural communities. It circulates almost 5 million items annually and has a budget of approximately CAD 23 million.

Hamilton has great pride, and a history of developing local solutions. Partnerships were in use locally long before they became popular elsewhere. Over 20 years ago the Ontario government commissioned a study of Hamilton partnerships to determine if partnerships were a viable concept for application elsewhere. By the early 1990s, if an organization wanted to access provincial grants, they were required to find local partners.

At any given time in the past 15 years the Hamilton Public library has had about ten to twenty partnerships of different sizes on the go. Each partnership initiative typically involves several partners, and so the total number of partners likely exceeds 200. The Library no longer always takes the initiative in looking for partnership opportunities. As successful partnerships evolve, partners return

with other possibilities to explore. The Library is now at the point that it receives more requests for partnerships than can be accommodated, and so, only those partnerships which advance the library's and the community's goals are selected.

What Hamilton Public Library Brings to Every Partnership

One of the first lessons we learned is that other organizations value a partnership with the public library. There are many reasons for this.

- **Honest Broker:** The Library is perceived as the honest broker, without its own agenda. The only agenda that public libraries can, and should, push in partnership development is the right of everyone in the community to have access to information, and that information must be shared.
- **Credibility:** Libraries are perceived as credible, fair and ethical institutions. The Library's enduring values of inclusiveness, accessibility, and confidentiality are valued by other partners.
- **Reputation:** Libraries must earn their reputation not only by consistently demonstrating these values but by delivering what is promised. Because Hamilton Public Library has a track record of delivering services, other agencies approach the Library to partner.
- **Infrastructure:** Libraries must be prepared to offer support to a partnership. Historically Hamilton Public Library has offered accounting, publicity, space, project supervision, and research expertise. However, increasingly, it has been necessary not to tie up too much organizational capacity in support of partnerships and so the focus is on the provision of leadership and unique library skills.
- **Ability to commitment:** When a partnership is under discussion participants must be able to commit to a plan of action and provide organizational support. At Hamilton Public Library, all senior staff are authorized to commit resources if a partnership advances the library's strategic goals. Partnerships are included in the Strategic Plan, and the responsibility for them included in various job descriptions.
- **Strong skill base:** The information skills of staff are relevant in a variety of related environments. The skill sets of library staff are not only valued, but are transferable and useful to other agencies. In addition, the Library is

perceived as a leader in the area of information technology, particularly in the area of content development and management

- **Labour relations:** Partnerships may result in requests to deliver services differently than permitted by a staff agreement. The staff bargaining unit needs to be consulted in advance so that the library is positioned to meet the community's expectations and to create new job opportunities for staff.

The First Partnership – The Adult Basic Education Association

The Hamilton Public Library's first partnership experience was an adult literacy partnership that started in 1983 and is still going today. It came about because the public library set up an adult literacy tutoring program and this raised the concern that it duplicated existing services. As a result, all providers of literacy programs met to discuss the areas of overlap. The original discussion led to the formation of an association (The Adult Basic Education Association) where service providers could coordinate and develop services. Gradually, as the extent of the adult literacy problem became known, the vision of a large integrated network of programs where adults could learn to read and upgrade their education skills in a positive, adult-oriented environment emerged.

The Association hired project staff, (originally only for 3 months since that was all the funding there was), to raise awareness of adult literacy issues, to provide referrals to existing programs, and to identify gaps and weaknesses in the service network from the customer perspective. Hamilton Public Library provided both the space and accounting support for the project.

Meanwhile, the Association lobbied the provincial government to provide long term funding for adult literacy initiatives. This lobbying was successful and funds became available for more than 10 years. At the peak there were five high schools for adults, courses at the community college, and several community-based programs which used volunteers to help other adults in Hamilton. The Library's own tutoring program grew tenfold, with over 200 student-tutor pairs meeting at various library locations. In addition, the public library also provided traditional library functions to those students enrolled in other community

programs, encouraging adult literacy classes to visit the library, obtain a library card, and use the resources.

The long-term value of this literacy initiative, was the way that it changed the Library's approach to the delivery of core services. Since this was the first time that adults who could not read were using the library, staff needed to learn more about their needs, and how to provide information at appropriate reading levels. More effort was made to purchase collections for adults at different reading levels and in non-print formats. Publicity was written in clear language. More recently, the Library worked with the federal government on a 3-year pilot project to document how the tutor-based approach could meet the needs of recent immigrants. This program (known as LINC – Language Instruction to Newcomers in Canada) is now an ongoing federal initiative. All programs change over time, and gradually the Library's program has shifted to support immigrants as funding for the earlier stream – English-speaking Canadians who could not read – was discontinued.

What Did We Learn from This?

Partnerships are powerful. They work

When all groups work together to identify the need and the vision, the end result is powerful. Together, the partners learned the power of lobbying, and the impact on a community when agencies work together. This experience gave us the courage to try other partnerships. It carried us through our next couple of partnerships where the collaboration was much more difficult to achieve.

The Library should not quickly give up its core business – the information business

In retrospect, perhaps we could have positioned the library better if the Library had retained the information role instead of setting up a separate organization to do it. Yes, the Library ran a successful tutoring program; and yes, it had a positive benefit on the library. But within the Association we were just one more service provider, and a small one at that. In subsequent partnerships the Library used its unique skills as information providers to further the community's agenda. In this and the next partnership, the information

service was positioned as an intermediary between the client and the information. This approach is no longer as relevant today since the focus has moved to content development and management of electronic information resources, rather than the creation of one-on-one client-based information services. However, it demonstrates the evolution of partnerships and community expectations.

Dynamics change if a partnership results in the creation of a new organization

The creation of new organizations is a frequent offshoot of cooperative partnerships since it maintains the power base between the original partners. Caution is advised. New organizations require a lot of support from the original members. The determination of the vision, goals, objectives, not to mention policies, procedures, and financial and human resource issues demands time and energy. The new staff, brimming with creativity and enthusiasm, will involve the original partners in many activities in support of the cause. When the new organization is established, the dynamics of the original partnership change. The new organization may become as strong as, or stronger, than the original members, and may even become a competitor.

Opportunities for new partnerships can be identified

It is possible to look ahead for new partnership opportunities. For example, by watching emerging government programs and those sectors which drive economic growth, public libraries can position themselves to take advantage of new areas of interest. In Canada, the literacy wave was followed by services for disabled persons, multiculturalism, career information, networking and technology, and early childhood education.

The Disability Information Services Helpline

The Hamilton Central Library has a department, the Resource Centre for Disabled Persons, which provides materials in alternate formats, publications about disabilities, and information about services for disabled persons. Staff from this department was invited to meet with social and health care providers to address the stated problem that "there were no services for disabled

persons and that those services which did exist were insufficient to meet the needs.” Participants were requested to put together proposals to address this issue with the understanding that the committee would select one and help find funding to make the proposal a reality.

Staff from the Library and the Community Information Service (CIS), an agency also located in the library that provides referrals to non-profit and service agencies, conferred and agreed that the real problem was not the stated one. Rather, the problem was that disabled persons did not know how to find out what was available, or were unable to access services because there was no interagency service coordination or referrals.

The Library and the Community Information Service (CIS), proposed the establishment of an information and referral service with a component of informal counselling, thus integrating and expanding the information work already provided by both the Library and the Community Information Service. The service would be offered as a ‘one-stop shopping’ model to facilitate problem-solving of multiple issues. Both parties recognized that the proposed clientele would not think of the Library as the place to go to for this type of assistance. Therefore, a ‘front’ was required, and the Disability Information Services Helpline (DISH) was born. It was set up to be perceived as a separate entity, although it was fully integrated with the Library and CIS. Two staff would provide the information service and identify service gaps for other agencies. The Library would provide the infrastructure support (i.e. space, supervision, publicity, book-keeping, and collections). The CIS would provide access to their database of community resources, which in turn the DISH staff would expand and update in their area of expertise. An Advisory Committee of service providers and disabled persons would add the community’s perspective to this partnership.

The original planning group required several meetings to explore the proposal since information services concepts were new to them. Meanwhile Library and CIS staff needed to learn the language of the health care and social services sectors. Eventually DISH was established and is still operational. Funding has always been an issue since the social service and health care sectors have been restructured several times. Fortunately, the DISH staff has a high community profile as

advocates and experts in the disability issues, and the work which they do is valued by the community. When the local rehabilitation hospital looked to establishing a similar hospital-based service for its clientele, it was decided to move the DISH operations to the hospital two days a week. This change of location did not affect the original client base, since the phone service is offered from both locations, but this move ensured funding stability.

The value to the Library was again that a different client group was introduced to library services. The use of the collection in the Resource Centre rose dramatically. This also provided the impetus to review the library facilities and services to ensure that these met accessibility standards.

What Did We Learn?

Speak the language of the partners

It was necessary to develop a vocabulary that spanned both fields. The term ‘informal counselling’ was developed to describe the service. This described a level of service which went beyond ‘in-depth reference service’ which is typically provided by a public library, but is less than ‘counselling’ provided by the health care field. It recognized that significant time per client was required to address multiple issues. For each situation, the client would be presented with options and sufficient background information to make informed choices.

Library collections are important

As the service matured, the biggest surprise was how useful the Library’s collections were to the clientele. Responses were enhanced by providing information from the Library’s collection. Clients reported that this information was often more helpful than the referrals to other agencies. Subsequently when partnerships are developed a collection component has been included.

Manage expectations

Library staff learned to state what the Library could and was willing to do, and as well as to state what could not be done right up front. This was a difficult partnership and this clarity ensured DISH’s survival later when funding continued to be an issue.

Career and Employment Resource Centres

The Hamilton Public Library's five Career and Employment Resource Centres emerged out of an earlier partnership which created a Hamilton Business Directory, a multi-agency public-private partnership. The Federal government was one of the partners and so when it decided to get out of direct service provision and instead fund community agencies (public and private) to provide career and employment counselling and information, it asked the Library to start a Career Centre. The first centre was so successful, that the federal government redirected its funding in Hamilton to support more library-based centres. There are now centres in five Library branches.

The Library's Career and Employment Resource Centres provide job hunting and career information. Each Centre has a collection of approximately 1,000 items, access to online resources, as well as additional computers with résumé-writing software for public use and a fax machine to enable job hunters to e-mail or fax in résumés. There is a staff person for each Centre who provides assistance in job search strategies and résumé writing by appointment or by chance.

The library wins because career information is a natural fit and an expansion of its information and lifelong learning roles. Staff at those branches where there is a Centre have upgraded their reference skills to support the types of questions being asked. Again we are attracting different customers.

What Have We Learned?

Information skills of library staff are highly valued

The funders value the quality of the service provided by library staff. An independent evaluation of various Career Centres throughout the city determined that those run by library staff provided the best quality service, even when measured against other long-time service providers.

Adhere to core values at all times

Initially it appeared that the Library's core values, of inclusiveness, accessibility and confidentiality, were at conflict with the requirements of the

funder. Through open and ongoing discussions a way was found to address their needs without violating these values. However, the Library was prepared to withdraw from the partnership, with all of the negative service implications, if a solution could not be found.

The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board

The Hamilton Public Library has worked for many years with the Public School Board to address student needs in many ways. Recently a formal partnership agreement was signed which outlines the ways in which the two organizations cooperate, and delineates both shared responsibilities, and the lead responsibilities for each organization. By doing this, the value that the library brings to the local public schools is now clearly articulated and understood.

What Have We Learned?

Create value

The power of this collaboration came from combining partners' core competencies in mutually reinforcing ways. For example, in this partnership it was agreed that the Public Library would take the lead role in providing electronic information resources (including negotiation of the leasing arrangements), thereby freeing the schools to focus on other areas.

The process of talking is as important as the end result

We have observed that the starting point of a partnership is the tendency to talk about what each partner wants from the partnership and what the other partners can do to help, as opposed to what can be done together. It is only as both sides communicate their issues, and share a common language that the areas of mutual benefit and concern can be identified. When this happens, the synergy of the partnership is at its most powerful, as the next partnership will illustrate.

Multicultural Early Learning Initiatives (MELD)

MELD is a family literacy project planned and implemented by eleven community partners. It

is intended to reach new immigrant families and provide parents with support for their children's early learning and school readiness. MELD is supported by dual¹ language family workbooks, accessible dual language collections and family programs. A group of teachers developed a workbook based upon five school readiness skills for parents and children to work with at home. Library staff then hold programs in the schools to encourage parents and children to participate in the program. At these sessions, parents and children are encouraged to complete one activity from the workbook together and each child receives a book bag and a sticker sheet. Parents and children are also encouraged to visit the local library. When a child completes the five activities, the child returns the workbook to the school where these are displayed. Teachers also encourage the children and their parents to visit the library and they make library card applications available in any of the project's six languages.

What Have We Learned?

Use your community's strengths to address issues

This is a project that neither the school board nor the library could do on their own. It needed the knowledge and support of the local immigrant community to identify the specific needs of the various cultures, and provide translation assistance. This is a partnership of partnerships since such diverse groups as SISO (Settlement and Immigration Services) CATCH (Community Access to Child Health) and CAPC (Community Access Programs for Children) enabled this project to focus on very specific needs of a vulnerable clientele.

The Summer Reading Clubs

Hamilton Public Library partners with several organizations to offer the Summer Reading programs. This partnership is different from previous partnerships, in that it is based on the fundraising model to enable the library to meet community expectations. The catalyst for this is both library- and community-driven. On one hand, the program is so popular that existing library resources cannot meet the demand without community assistance. On the other hand, there are many organizations who like to give funds to support children and reading. Partners include: a bank,

several chapters of a local service club, the federal government Summer Work Experience grants, a book distributor, media partners, social agencies, some individual donors, and local businesses.

Most libraries are aware of the benefits and values of a Library's summer reading programs and Hamilton Public Library experiences are no different. This program has run for more than 35 years. There are four different reading clubs for readers, reluctant readers, teens and preschoolers with over 10,000 participants. Each summer over 30 students are hired to assist with the programs. In addition, an adult reading club was introduced this summer.

What Have We Learned?

Show the BIG picture

It is far more effective to package the results of the whole program, and show each partner its contributions to the whole rather than to show only their specific contribution. For example, when we showed the federal department that they partially funded 30+ summer positions, as opposed to fully funding six positions, they were able to use this as leverage to obtain more funding for summer jobs in public libraries in subsequent years.

Build relationships

Donor recognition is very important and is very labour intensive. This annual process is time-consuming but absolutely necessary to keep an ongoing commitment. Libraries which choose to fundraise for ongoing programs must recognize that there can be as much work in the ongoing care of donors as there is in running the program itself and be willing to make this commitment. This can be very difficult unless there is a department or foundation to support the Library's fundraising efforts. It is not possible to support many ongoing programs at one time with fundraising efforts unless the infrastructure is in place.

The Hamilton Spectator

This partnership is included because it was one of the few that Library staff actively cultivated over an extended period of time. The *Hamilton Spectator* is the local newspaper and has been a library partner for several years. Each year a

formal agreement is signed in which they specify how they will provide advertising (up to CAD 50,000 annually) to support various library initiatives. In return, they are the major partner for several annual events such as:

- The *Power of the Pen* – the annual teen writing contest which first began in 1994.
- The Summer Reading Club programs.
- The first *One Book, One City* promotion in 2004.

Various *Spectator* reporters and editors were asked to assist in many library initiatives to build trust and demonstrated the similarity of the interests and values of the two organizations. Personal contact was encouraged (e.g. to judge a children's bookmark contest) and opportunities were provided for them to meet the clientele of the programs they were supporting. The sales department was encouraged to sell newspapers at the annual book sale. The Library never asked for free advertising for its core business, but ensured that some advertising was regularly purchased. Gradually, as the number of initiatives in which they were participating grew, the *Spectator* asked to talk about a more formal relationship. The Hamilton Public Library then became one of six organizations which it formally supports as a community partner.

What Did We Learn?

Meet the needs of the sponsor

Media organizations have very specific guidelines about who they will partner with and for what purpose. Generally, they have a statement of purpose that relates to their business plan. When making a case for their sponsorship, (i.e. partnership) it is important to pay particular attention to their needs and expectations. For example, since it is important to the *Spectator* that their auditorium be used, the opening reception for the *One Book, One City* initiative was held there.

Recognize what business they are in

One important factor to remember is that the local paper is in the advertising business. It is essential not to ask for free coverage for something that the Library should be paying for. It is also advisable to purchase some advertising, even though budgets

are often constrained. If Hamilton Public Library were not also a client of the *Spectator*, it doubtful that the partnership would have emerged.

Hamilton-Wentworth Information Network (HWIN)

This partnership shows what can happen when the Library provides the vision for its community. Both of these partnerships resulted in success far beyond what was first believed possible.

In the early 1990s the Library established the Hamilton Wentworth Information Network, consisting of representatives of the Boards of Education, Mohawk College, McMaster University, and the Library in order to discuss the sharing of information resources. At first, the initiatives focused on collection issues, but very quickly it moved to connectivity issues. The group's goal, expanded to include the City and local business, was to build a strong electronic network. Under the leadership of this group, *all* public buildings such as city facilities, recreation centres, fire halls, schools, libraries (including those in distant rural communities), the college and the university are connected by fibre cable and there is a direct T10 Internet cable that connects Hamilton to Toronto for the exclusive use of these partners. All of this was done with operating funds, at a fraction of the cost had it been done individually and in an uncoordinated manner. And, symbolically, the network support equipment is located in the Central Library, a memento of the lead role the library played in this initiative.

What Did We Learn?

Lead with your knowledge and your vision

The Library was able to use its leading-edge knowledge of the information business to address a city-wide issue. It expanded the vision to ensure that all public buildings, not just libraries, had good quality, high-speed electronic connections. It made it work by planning and building the network with other partners to ensure that the network was not only robust but also cost-effective, as this cooperative approach greatly reduced the initial costs. This positioned the city and the Library to provide services in dramatically different ways.

The City of Hamilton

This partnership is unusual because we actively seek out ways in which we can partner with the City² for various initiatives to strengthen the relationship and build trust and credibility. The City of Hamilton is the source of the Library's funding. Therefore we actively seek opportunities to partner *with* them to provide services for other clients, as well as for opportunities to provide services *for* the city itself.

What Did We Learn?

Showcase the talents and skills of your library, even if there is no immediate payoff

The Hamilton Public Library offers staff support whenever possible. For example, a librarian was loaned to a city department to help organize the content for a Call Center. Library staff edited a report for the City Management Team to ensure a common voice and consistent information. The Library selected and ordered a reference collection for a city-operated service. It is true that the Library incurred costs for these but the resulting goodwill is beyond measurement.

Help find solutions for their problems

After amalgamation, the city found it necessary to rent expensive downtown office space. The Library offered to move its Technical Services to another city building, thus freeing prime downtown space at the Central Library for the city's use. This not only resulted in savings of over CAD 500,000 annually, but more importantly the City's Information Technology Department relocated to this space, which has created synergies and opportunities for further cooperation and collaboration.

This strategy has resulted in a climate of goodwill and mutual trust and respect. In turn, this led to a new partnership which has the potential to integrate the Library into the life of the community more than ever before possible.

MyHamilton.ca: The Community Portal

The newest, and possibly the most challenging, of all of our partnerships has been the new Hamilton

community portal. It builds on the work of a number of earlier partnership initiatives such as the Business Information Network, and an earlier website called PICHamilton (Public Information Centre Hamilton) which searched and indexed information from the partners of the HWIN network and community non-profit groups. But the true catalyst was the mutual respect between Library and City staff in the technology and information area.

The portal for the City of Hamilton provides a common interface and navigation for all city, library and community organizations. It replaces other community information sources such as PICHamilton. It is a one-stop source of information about any service, need, or program that exists in the city. E-commerce will enable individuals to conduct business with the city electronically. Gradually as this expands, customers will even be able to pay library fines on-line.

The design of the portal's interface is unique because of the high profile which the library receives. On each page there is a link to the Hamilton Public Library. Each time someone searches for information, a box on the right hand side of the page provides simultaneous consolidated searching of the Library's collections. For example, if someone is seeking information about day care providers, the main window will provide information about the day care centres in Hamilton while the box at the right will provide the books and articles about day care in the Library's collections. In this way, Library resources are truly integrated into the lives of Hamilton residents.

The portal provides opportunities for community discussions groups, for forums on various topics, and space for non-profit organizations to participate. One specific role that the Library assumed in the development of the portal was not only the championing and guiding the community's access to the portal, but more importantly the training of community groups to mount and use information.

Library staff were heavily involved in the portal's development. The portal's development was led by a team of three, one of whom was a library manager who was seconded to the project for a full year at the Library's expense.

What Did We Learn?

A high level of trust is required

In earlier partnerships, there was time for all partners to learn a common language. However, when a partnership is based upon a leading-edge application which requires a high level of technical expertise, partners either enter the partnership with the necessary expertise, or they are not able to participate in all decisions. In this partnership, situations arose which exposed a partner to significant risk. It was necessary for that partner to make critical decisions on behalf of the entire group to protect itself. For this to happen trust was critical; if lacking it could have destroyed the partnership and brought the project to a halt.

Manage expectations

This lesson brings us back to one of the earliest lessons learned through our partnerships – manage expectations. Even though the development team's project is complete and the team members have returned to their regular jobs, those partners who were unable to participate fully continue to have unmet expectations. As an interim solution, several librarians have been appointed Channel masters in order to assist these partners to more fully recognize the portal's potential.

The Hamilton Tiger Cats

This next partnership is one of the most fun partnerships we have been involved with. The Tiger Cats are the local Canadian Football League team. The team was recently bought by a former Hamiltonian, Bob Young, known to many as the founder of Red Hat, a software company. He hired a young and ambitious marketing team to renew the franchise and boost attendance, and so the marketing director approached the Library to do a joint promotion.

A number of ideas were pitched for their support and they chose the Summer Reading Club as their major focus because its demographics met their target audience. The Ticats arranged to give each child who joined one of the summer reading clubs two free tickets for a game. Last summer the library gave out over 20,000 free tickets. But it didn't stop there. They also made and distributed

posters of football players reading to kids in the library. There was a promotional day where the players worked at the circulation desk to help 'sign out' materials. They included the library in all of their promotional materials such as tray mats at the local fast food restaurants "because it doesn't cost us anything and it is for a good cause." They made one game night, 'the Hamilton Public Library night' and made a promotional video of the library to show before the game, and during halftime. In addition, they reduced ticket prices for library staff and gave a half-price admission to anyone who donated a children's book that evening.

What Did We Learn?

Customers grow up and will remember you, and in ways that you can't anticipate

We learned later that the Marketing Director who approached us had fond memories of libraries from his childhood. His mother was a teacher who strongly encouraged reading and his use of the library. So keep up the good work!

Everyone wins

This partnership provided a 'win-win' for both partners. Attendance at the games soared and as it became a family activity the Tiger Cats were actually able to measure this by a slip in beer sales! (Fortunately, this was offset by increased food revenue.) As for the impact on the summer reading program – there was an increase in the number of boys ages 10–12 years old who participated, and this group read more books per person than in previous years.

Partnerships that celebrate libraries and literacy are fun and engaging

So select your game. Choose your team. Practice and play hard. Show your appreciation. Celebrate the results.

In Conclusion

Add Value to Your Community

Libraries must focus their efforts on adding value to their local community. In return, the benefits to the Library will take care of themselves.

Focus on Core Strengths and Skills

The provision and organization of information, services to children, the promotion of books, reading and literacy, are all areas where partnerships are a natural fit.

Anticipate Trends in Public Policy

Future partnership opportunities can often be determined by watching new government initiatives and then getting involved with them. In Ontario, the literacy wave has been followed by services for disabled persons, multiculturalism, career information, networking and technology, and most recently early childhood education.

Showcase the Skills of Library Staff

Remember that the skill set of library staff is second to none when information is being provided. Encourage partnerships which use library staff to provide information – they will shine.

Be True to Your Core Values

Inclusiveness, accessibility, confidentiality and the insistence on the sharing of information are all enduring strengths valued by others. Don't compromise these for any partnership.

Make the Effort

Partnerships are hard work. Make the effort to develop win-win relationships and overcome obstacles. Partnership development requires it. It also requires creativity, lateral thinking, active listening and the ability to synthesize varying agendas into a workable whole. Remember there is more than one way to make something happen so keep the lines of communication open and the solution will evolve.

Savour the Results

And finally when the partnership is running, savour the results. It will all be worth it if your community is a better place for your efforts.

Notes

1. Languages include Urdu, Vietnamese, French, Portuguese, Turkish and Punjabi. These were selected by the participating schools.
2. In Ontario, The Public Library Act mandates that public libraries are independent organizations operating under the direction of a Board of Directors with funding provided by the local municipality.

Edited version of a paper presented at the World Library and Information Congress, Oslo, Norway, 2005, in session 104, Division of Libraries Serving the General Public.